

*Cover Color Photograph
by Bill Hughes*

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MICHAEL ST. JOHN, Publisher

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CHARLES W. ADAMS, Art Director

GERALD ADAMS, Assistant Art Director

N. F. KING, Managing Editor

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JOE SHORE, Advertising Rep.

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a torch for Tess

*If it meant giving up my badge to gun
Kaiser, I'd give it up. The job had to
be done, that's all*

BY JACK RITCHIE

STEVE KAISER smiled at us now the way he always smiled when we came to question him. "You're bothering me again," he said.

He slouched in the easy chair with the first drink of the day in his hand. He was a big man in shirt sleeves and he had eyes that laughed at all the little people in the world and especially at me.

"Why the hell do you boys come to me every time," he complained with a grin. "I could be innocent."

Kaiser was too important a man now to get his own hands dirty. But he pushed the button and the job was done. The little punk Vasco had his last look at life in a dirty alley and then he left it stitched from chin to belt buckle with .45 slugs.

"Vasco was pushing snow where he had no business to be," I said. "He set up a stand of his own. We know you don't like free enterprise."

Kaiser clicked his tongue sadly. "Imagine," he said. "Snow. That's a dirty racket."

Berg tested the tip of his ball-point and was ready. "How about it?" he asked. "What lovely alibi have you got made for last night?"

"Just the usual," Kaiser said. He took his time sipping at his bourbon. "I hosted a poker game here last night. Played until two in the morning with Benson, my lawyer, Hilliard, my doc, Durbin, my Banker, and Judge Moore."

"Your judge?" Berg asked.

"Let's refer to him as the Eminent Jurist. That has a nice ring."

"And after that?" I asked. And then I wished the hell I'd kept my mouth shut.

Tess Paterson was on the arm of Kaiser's chair watching me with those strange gray eyes. A lock of her taffy colored hair dangled over her forehead.

Kaiser ran a hand slowly along the length of her thigh and smiled at me. "You tell, Ryan, baby," he said. "He'll get a thrill out of it."

She patted him absently on the head. "I'll testify in court if I have to." There was no expression in her voice.

"Thanks," Kaiser said. He scratched an eyebrow and grinned. "I'm getting ahead of the script. What time did poor Vasco leave us?"

"Around ten," Berg said. "Did it go according to schedule?"

"Ten is a nice time," Kaiser said. "Not too early. Not too late." He turned his grin on me. "So what do you care what happened after ten?"

Tess rose and stretched her long slim body. "Can I fix anybody a drink?"

"Never mind," I said. "We're not here because we like the company."

"Baby's only trying to help," Kaiser said. "You'd be surprised how useful she is."

I tapped a cigarette on the cocktail table. "You can get some good dames for twenty bucks a night. How much is she costing you?"

Tess's eyes glittered, but she said nothing.

"She's expensive, but worth every penny of it," Kaiser agreed amiably. "Not every man could afford her."

Tess turned her back on us and walked over to the small corner bar.

Kaiser's dark eyes sparkled. "I get a kick out of you, Ryan. I've been spreading the word around and all the boys do too. They all know this torch you're carrying for Tess."

I flicked on the lighter and held it to my cigarette. "I can forget I'm a cop," I said. "I can forget it easy."

Kaiser rattled the ice cubes in his glass. "Don't do it on account of me. I got a headache and I'm out of condition. Besides, I don't think Berg would just sit there and watch."

"If you two are through talking your fight," Berg said, "let's get back to the thing we're here for." He flipped a page of his notebook. "The gun that killed Vasco did the same for Bannion three months ago. It also took care of Waldek

last year. That's according to Ballistics."

"Amazing," Kaiser said. "Just like a signature."

We asked fifteen minutes more worth of questions, but they were routine and got us nothing. They never did with Kaiser, but it was our job to ask them. We left at a quarter to eleven.

In the car, Berg said, "Do you always have to make some crack about the dame?"

"Think I hurt her feelings?"

"So she's not a good little girl. We know it and she knows it. Why get hot and bothered?"

He lighted a cigar and puffed at it. "I guess we better see Willie now. He said to make it around eleven."

I nosed the car into the traffic lane. "What good does this do us, besides the exercise? Kaiser's so worried he's laughing."

"When I was young I was impatient too," Berg said. "But I've seen them come and go. Some taller than Kaiser."

Berg regarded me seriously. "I guess it's easier for me to wait," he said. "I got only one reason for hating him."

He drummed his fingers idly on his knee and told me, "You know that dame could put her shoes under my bed any time. I'm not as young as I used to be, but I'd try."

I skidded to a stop as the traffic light ahead of me changed. "Why the hell don't you shut up, Berg?"

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Willie Shank is a small blond man who earns his bread and butter by visiting people's homes while they're at the movies.

Once in a while Willie gets caught. But he considers it one of the risks of his trade and he has a forgiving nature. He doesn't hate cops.

Willie also has a part-time job. He collects information and sells it.

We found him in his usual bar hunched contentedly over a short beer. He waved us to chairs. "Make me an offer."

Berg took a seat. "Where else can you peddle it? Five bucks if I think it's worth it."

"Let's toss it back and forth."

Berg shook his head. "Wouldn't do any good."

Willie sighed. He saluted us with the glass and emptied it. "Yesterday afternoon I accidentally run across Pinky Newton carrying a suitcase down the main drag. I wonder why he's in town, knowing his reputation and such, so I keep him in sight. He registers at the Holton."

"This is a big crime?" Berg said.

"I'm getting to it," Willie said. "He just registers, see? And has his suitcase sent up to his room. Next he leaves the joint. I got nothing else to do, so I tag along about a block behind."

"You like the way he walks?" I asked.

Willie's eyes were reproachful. "He went up to Steve Kaiser's

place and stayed there for about an hour."

"And when he came out?" Berg asked.

Willie opened his mouth, and then hesitated. "Nothing. I lost him."

Berg turned to me and lifted his shoulders. "So Pink's in town. He wants to get away from his mother-in-law."

"Now don't be that way, Berg," Willie said. "We all know how Pinky earns money for his Dacron suits. And I heard Vasco got his last night."

"Do you think that's worth five bucks, Willie?" I asked.

He closed his eyes. "I'm glad this is only a sideline. I could starve." His lids raised. "I'd like to point out that Pinky was in town too when Bannion tried to eat those .45 slugs."

He folded his hands. "I thought it was worth ten."

"Pinky's probably back home by now," I said.

Willie put the five dollar bill Berg handed him into his wallet. "This is for free. He was still checked in at his hotel half an hour ago. Looks like he hit the bottle and forgot to leave."

At the desk of the Holton we found there was no Pinky Newton registered. But a bellboy recognized his description and that helped the clerk to remember that a Mr. Morgan in 1214 must be the man we were looking for.

Berg and I rode the elevator to the twelfth floor and rapped on the panel of door number 1214.

"Who the hell is it?" Pinky's irritated voice wanted to know.

"The police," Berg said. "We'd like a few words with you."

We heard the creaking of bed springs and then Pinky opened the door. He was short and slightly overweight. Carrot hair retreated untidily from his forehead.

His blood-shot eyes looked us over. "Thought I recognized your voice, Berg. I see you're still working, Ryan."

"Mind if we come in?" Berg asked.

"Sit down anywhere," Pinky said.

We followed Pinky in. He made his way to the unmade bed and sat down on it. He rubbed his head gingerly.

"Like to tell us what you were doing last night?" Berg asked.

"If I look like I feel, you ought to be able to guess," Pinky said. "I sat here in this room just drinking quiet. I started at eight and the last I remember it was twelve."

"Got anybody to agree with you?" Berg asked.

"I'll shop around," Pinky said. "Do I need anybody?"

"You know Vasco?" I asked.

"Never heard of him," Pinky said. A smirk came to his lips. "I been hearing about you, Ryan. Kaiser got to talking about you."

I came up close to him and the smirk disappeared.

Berg put a hand on my shoulder and pushed me away. "You saw Kaiser?" he asked.

Pinky thought about it. "All right," he said. "I saw Kaiser yesterday afternoon. We talked over old times. So?"

"Mind if we look your room over?" Berg asked.

"Have I got a choice?" Pinky asked. "Be my guest."

Berg and I combed the room while Pinky dragged on a cigarette. We found nothing interesting.

I went through Pinky's coat lying on the bed and then ran my hands over Pinky.

He was patient about it. "See," he said. "Clean."

"That's what smells, Pinky," I said. "I hear you feel naked without a gun."

"I left it home," Pinky said. "Didn't think I'd need it in this town."

I put Pinky's hat on his head and handed him his coat. "You got objections to answering a few questions down at headquarters?"

"I got objections," he said. "Does it make any difference?" He slipped into his coat. "What's the book? Suspicion of what?"

"We'll let it be a surprise," Berg said.

Downstairs in the car I got into the back seat with Pinky. I snapped cuffs on his wrist and mine.

"Afraid of me?" Pinky asked curiously.

"How about it, Berg?" I asked.

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"I like the idea," Berg said. "But let's just keep it only an idea. With my pension coming into focus I like to do things by the numbers."

"It wouldn't do you any good," Pinky said complacently. "I been massaged by professionals." He considered it. "Sometimes I even think I like it."

He watched the scenery. "I don't think it's the pension stopping you, Berg. You're not the type." He glanced at me. "With Ryan it's different."

We covered a dozen blocks and then I tapped Berg on the shoulder. "Pull up at the next corner. I'm out of smokes."

Berg eased the car to the curb and idled the motor.

"Hell," I said. "Be an obliging policeman and get me a couple of packs. Otherwise I got to unlock these cuffs."

Berg switched off the ignition and groaned his way from behind the wheel. "Okay. But you got to scratch my next itch. And you know where that's going to be."

I waited until Berg was inside the supermarket and then I unlocked the cuffs. "Get in the front seat, Pinky. And don't argue about it."

"Who's arguing?" Pinky said. He did as he was told.

Berg was deep inside the store with his back toward me. As I started the motor Pinky opened his mouth to yell for Berg. I clipped

Pinky's Adam's apple with the side of my hand and he gasped for air.

Even if Berg saw me, I figured he wouldn't have time to get out of the store and do anything about it. I spun the car around the corner.

I would have preferred someplace out in the country, but I knew I couldn't make it. Berg would have a general alarm out in a few minutes and every cruiser in the city would be looking for me.

The warehouse district was near and it was quiet. I parked behind a shed near the river.

Pinky fingered his throat nervously. "Now what's on your mind?"

I said nothing while I looked him over. He was scared the way a hard guy is scared. I could work on him until my knuckles were raw, but in between sobs he'd spit in my face.

"Pinky," I said finally, "you take your beatings with a smile because you know they're going to be nothing more than just beatings. You know even a tough cop will go so far and no further."

"You're not gonna be a cop long," Pinky said. "How you figure on squaring this?"

"Pinky," I said. "I'm not a cop now."

He blinked, thinking about what I'd said.

"I won't know when to stop," I said.

"What if I do talk," Pinky said. "What good will it do you? You

can't use anything I say in court."

"Don't worry about court," I told him. "Just worry about me."

I slashed at him twice. Short, sharp jabs that broke the skin.

When Pinky shook himself out of it, he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped at the blood coming from his nose. His voice was muffled. "Hell," he said. "Why should I take a beating when it don't mean anything? You know damn well I gunned Vasco."

"And how does Kaiser come in?"

"Just the way you think."

"About the gun?" I asked.

"I threw it in a sewer. I don't remember where."

"Don't hand me that," I said. "You kept it after the Bannion job and after you took care of Waldek. Where is it, Pinky?"

He shook his head. "This is where I stop talking."

I snapped a short left to the bridge of his swelling nose. "I told you once I'm not a cop now. I'll keep this up until I kill you if I have to."

He waited until the pain lessened and then looked into my eyes. "It's that dame, ain't it? She's driving you crazy."

The rage came swelling into me and I saw Pinky only as something I wanted to kill. I jerked out my .38.

His eyes met the barrel of the gun and then they shifted to me.

He knew it then. He knew he was going to talk fast or die.

My voice was tight. "You might beat the chair, Pinky. But you can't beat this." I began a slow squeeze on the trigger.

His eyes went away from me and the gun and stared at the dashboard. He was hard and tough, but he didn't want to die. Sweat misted his forehead.

"Think about it fast," I said.

His face became gray and weary. "It's in a locker at the bus station."

"Where's the key?"

"I haven't got it. I left it with the clerk down there. Told him I was afraid of losing it."

"You can lie to me this once, Pinky," I said. "But it'll be the last time you lie to anyone."

"I'm not lying," he said angrily. "Let's get out of here."

I holstered the gun and handcuffed Pinky's wrists together. During the ride to headquarters he leaned back against the seat with his eyes closed. He shivered every once in a while.

I made it to headquarters without being stopped and there I handed him over to Lieutenant Shaw. I told him what to look for.

Shaw's gray-blue eyes were alive with question, but he put them off. He sent a couple of men to the bus station and gave me orders to wait in the squad room.

I borrowed cigarettes from one of the detectives and began walking the room. By five my mouth was parched and the cigarettes were gone.

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At six, Berg came in. "All I told the Lieutenant was that the car was gone when I got out."

"Thanks," I said.

"But he knows what Pinky looks like and can put the pieces together. Pinky himself is too busy fretting about his rap to care about what you did to him."

"How about the gun?" I asked.

"They found it," Berg said. He was uneasy. "The Lieutenant says for me to bring you to him."

Lieutenant Shaw looked at me with brooding eyes. "We did a rush job on the gun. It's the one that did the job. Fingerprints crawling all over it."

"How about Pinky? Has he got anything to say?"

"He thought about it for a couple of hours. Then I showed him what we had. I got his statement right here."

"Is it enough to bring in Kaiser?"

"It's enough," Shaw said.

"I'll get him," I said.

Shaw put the tips of his fingers together. "Don't bother, Ryan. You're suspended. There'll have to be an investigation."

"I'll get Kaiser first. Then investigate."

Shaw's voice was hard. "Don't tell me how to run my department."

I took out my wallet and unhooked the badge. I tossed it on his desk. "Keep it. I'm through."

He stared at the badge moodily. "Sometimes I wonder if I know all

that's going on around here." He looked at me. "What's got into you, Ryan? Not a blot on your record and suddenly you go beserk."

Behind me Berg cleared his throat. "Could I see you alone a minute, Lieutenant?"

"Shut up, Berg!" I said. "You got nothing to say."

Shaw glanced at Berg and then back at his desk. He flipped the badge with a forefinger. "I don't want your badge, Ryan. The suspension takes effect tomorrow. Bring in Kaiser, if that's what you're living for."

Berg and I went down to the car and made the trip to Kaiser's hotel in a fast ten minutes.

Tess Paterson in a mink coat was in the lobby talking to a bellboy. Three fine leather suitcases were at her feet.

Her face paled as she watched us approach.

"Looks like Kaiser got the word," I said. "You wouldn't care to tell us where he is now?"

She bit her lip. "Why not? He's upstairs in the apartment doing last minute packing."

Berg started for the elevators.

"Don't take it too hard," I said. "With your talent you ought to be able to turn up another sucker with money."

"Come on, Ryan!" Berg called impatiently.

"Maybe he'll get you two mink coats," I said.

Color came back into her cheeks.

"He might," she said. "Maybe three. Or a dozen."

I gripped her wrists hard. "That's what you want, isn't it?"

She twisted away. "And you haven't got a damn cent. So let me alone, can't you?"

I heard the car horn, but I wasn't paying attention. It was Berg who noticed. "It's Kaiser," he yelled, coming on the run. "He's in that car outside."

Evidently Kaiser didn't know that we were in the lobby. He leaned on the horn. He wanted to get away fast and he wanted Tess to come with him.

He saw me before I got to the swinging doors. For a fraction of a second he stared at me, and then he stepped on the gas. The car lurched away from the curb.

The traffic lights on the corner were against him, but Kaiser tried to shoot through. His big black car plowed into the side of a delivery truck.

I got to within fifty feet of the smash-up when Kaiser shouldered open the jammed door on the driver's side of his car. He leaped out holding an automatic and dashed across the intersection.

At the edge of a parking lot he stopped long enough to fire. Flakes of red brick chipped from the building on my right.

I ducked behind the corner mailbox and returned the shot. A windshield behind Kaiser snapped into a spiderweb of cracked glass. Kaiser

sprinted in among the parked cars.

Berg came up panting and crouched beside me. "Don't go after him in there," he said, breathing hard. "Wait until we get help."

I pulled away from him and dashed across the street and into the lot. A bullet skittered off the bumper of a Buick.

"Don't be stupid, Kaiser," I yelled. "You know I'll kill you if I get half a chance. Come out of there with your hands high."

He was four or five cars away and I could hear his feet crunch the gravel as he ran. He came into sight as he crossed an open spot and headed for the alley.

"I'm not talking again, Kaiser!" I shouted. "Stop or I'll kill you!"

Kaiser stopped and turned. He stood there a man alone. Then he raised his gun and leveled it swiftly. The automatic barked and the bullet sang as it passed my ear.

I fired before Kaiser could pull off another shot.

He reeled and staggered with the heavy load of the .38 slug in his chest. He fought to keep standing, but it took more strength than he had. He dropped to his knees and then sprawled forward. The automatic jumped from his hand and pin-wheeled to a stop ten feet away.

I came to him slowly and looked down. His black eyes burned with hate and he began a painful crawl for the automatic.

Berg trotted up and scooped up the gun. "Don't try any exercise,

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Kaiser," he said. "We'll get you to a doctor."

Kaiser's face twisted with pain and he buried his head in the crook of his arm. The fingers of his left hand made claw marks in the dirt. His body shuddered several times and then he gave up.

Berg got down on one knee. He lifted Kaiser's head and looked at it carefully. He lowered it back to its resting place.

"He won't give anybody trouble," Berg said, flatly. "He's dead."

They came now from doorways, from automobiles, and from the streets. It was a crowd that murmured and became bolder as it grew in numbers. It became a ragged circle around Kaiser, gripped with the terror, the curiosity, and the delight of another man's death.

Behind it, in the tired darkening day, sirens moaned their searching way closer to the target.

The prowling car men came first, and on their heels the ambulance, and then the technicians to measure, to take pictures, and to classify.

I smoked as I used methodical words to tell the Lieutenant what happened. I used words that were facts; long and wide, but with no depth, no meaning.

I told him about a man I had killed. I did not tell him how it feels to kill a man, even if you hated him, and even when there was nothing else you could do.

They turned to Berg at last, and I backed away. I backed away into the eager-eyed crowd, and then I turned and walked back to Kaiser's hotel.

The lobby was deserted except for the desk man and a bellboy who was picking up Tess's suitcases.

"Never mind taking those outside," I said. "She isn't going anywhere."

The little man looked at me curiously. "I wasn't taking them outside, Mister," he said. "Before the excitement started I was about to take them back upstairs."

I stared at him and he got nervous. "Put those down," I said, finally.

I fished half a dollar out of my pocket and tossed it to him. I walked to the elevators carrying the suitcases.

The door to Kaiser's apartment was half open. I closed it behind me and put down the bags.

Tess was at the window, a slim silhouette against the crawling darkness. Her mink coat lay on the floor in the gloom beside an easy chair.

"He's dead, isn't he?" she asked without turning.

"That's right," I said. "He's dead."

The clock on the fireplace mantle ticked off seconds.

"I'm the one who killed him," I said. "It was me, Ryan."

Her voice was tired and low.

"It was me, Ryan," she repeated.

"I didn't mean it that way," I said.

I came close to her. The edges of her hair were delicate featherings against the last remnants of light.

"You weren't going with him?" I asked.

"I should have," she said. "He was good to me."

"But you changed your mind. Why?"

She turned to face me. Her face was shadowed, but there was the glitter of tears. She passed around me and walked away.

I turned on one of the floor lamps and the mink on the floor was bright.

I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to grind my heel into the soft blue white fur until it was in shreds.

Tess watched me and waited.

I picked up the coat carefully and put it on the chair. "I won't be bothering you any more."

Tess put her hand on my arm. "Don't you every ask for anything? Are you always too proud?"

Those strange gray eyes were near and the scent of clean perfume was in the air.



Scales of Justice

Harold Loving, fined for gambling, didn't mind paying the \$40. But—he's going to fight to regain possession of the 406 dice which officers took from him during the raid—and it will probably be worth his while. Loving filed his suit against Oklahoma City Policy Chief Roy Bergman, who says the dice are loaded.

Oversized Property

"I sure wish I still had them yellow shoes," was the statement made by James Warner as he was taken off to jail.

Warner, ridding the apartment of Richard Johnson of \$400 worth of clothing, silverware and linen (two suitcases full) spotted the yellow shoes which he immediately replaced with his own.

Walking up to Lenox Ave. carrying one suitcase full of the loot, Detectives Garri and Donnelly, standing on the corner of 112th commented on the shoes. Nice shoes, those yellow shoes. Good shoes. But rather big for him? "Wonder what he's got in that suitcase?" pondered Garri.

Opening the suitcase they found part of the loot—the other suitcase, too heavy for Warner to carry, was hidden behind the apartment house at 237 W. 111th St.

Johnson reported to the 123d Street police station when notified of the theft and immediately took his size 13½ shoes from Warner and left him in his size 9 stocking feet.



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